

**Holy Father, John Paul II's Address
to the Members of the General Chapter
of the Congregation of Marians of the Immaculate Conception of the Most
B.V.M.
June 22, 1993**

Dear General Chapter Members:

1. I receive you at this special audience with great joy. My fraternal greetings go to everyone, but in a special way to Fr. Donald Petraitis and his collaborators, expressing to them my recognition for the work done by them with great love and zeal during all those years. I also wish to enfold in my sincere greetings all the confreres who serve in various nations for the good of souls. I desire that the Superior General, as well as members of the new General Council, that you are about to elect, will be able, with God's help, to care well for the Congregation and to guide it, in accord with the decrees given by the present General Chapter.

For the first time since the 50-year occupation of Communism, Marian priests from Lithuania, Latvia, and Ukraine are participating in the General Chapter. To them do I especially address my fraternal greetings together with this thought, that truly, in the midst of constant historical adversity one must not lose courage or trust. For the people and rulers of this world change along with the persecutors of truth and the Gospel, but the ultimate victory belongs to God; for His victory is always the triumph of mercy and peace.

2. In the course of this General Chapter you have analyzed the situation and needs of modern society; you reflected upon the Constitutions of your Congregation and its certain Marian spirituality. You have formulated decisions and recommendations needed for an increasingly zealous and effective pastoral undertaking. Let us together give thanks to the Lord and His heavenly Mother for graces given to you and let us fervently pray that you always live by their power and light.

Your experience is long and at times dramatic. It contains the treasures of three centuries of history that ensued from the moment when in the soul of Bl. Stanislaus Papczyński's (1631-1701) was born the idea of calling to life a *Congregation of the Immaculate Conception*, for which he obtained the Church's approval on October 24, 1673. Later a great reformation was accomplished by a Lithuanian, Fr. George Matulaitis-Matulewicz (1871-1927), subsequent Bishop of Vilnius and the Apostolic Visitor to Lithuania, whom I had the great honor of declaring blessed in June of 1987. And finally the events of our times.

Throughout all this time you have been carrying out your characteristic pastoral work by spreading devotion to the Blessed Virgin and the practice of assisting Souls in Purgatory. In addition, you preserve in your spirituality and historical annals the memory of people of great intellect and great asceticism whose example and teachings still remain timely both for you and the entire Church.

3. Dear Marian Fathers! Your Congregation is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary and its spirituality is definitely and radically Marian. This is not simply a question of piety, which is always real and necessary, but also the program as well as the all-embracing ideal of life and equally of pastoral undertakings. Thus let your gaze be always fixed on Mary. May your every decision, every apostolic initiative be in accord with her Immaculate and Sorrowful Heart.

The times, in which we live, are marked by numerous problems. Secularism is constantly making deeper inroads, exerting influence on the concrete behavior of individuals and entire countries. Religious indifference clouds and disorients consciences. A false concept of personal freedom seizes the margins of moral sensitivity, which in turn can lead to the glorification of vice and the structures of sin. Your presence and mission in the world exposed to these destructive powers must shine with the radiance of truth and supernatural love.

Always direct your thoughts and prayers to Mary – *the Seat of Wisdom* – so that she would enlighten you and give strength and endurance to your evangelical witness. With filial tenderness appeal to Mary – *the Comforter of the Afflicted*; imitate her example with enthusiasm and joy. People today need love, forgiveness and solidarity. Today it is vital to bring them hope and forbearance. One must be ready to support the one, who is wavering and the one, who is falling. The truth becomes convincing through love and selfless service.

And finally, when you think about Mary, Mother of Mercy, become yourselves filled with spiritual gentleness and compassion. May your everyday task and continuous concern be the salvation of souls redeemed by Christ's blood.

Dear Marian Fathers! Behold before you a large field of missionary work. Strongly rooted in your tradition and simultaneously following the demands of our times, carry forward your singular apostolate that inscribes itself well into the context of the New Evangelization, for which the entire People of God concerns itself. Therefore, be apostles of the Divine Mercy under the motherly and affectionate guidance of Mary -- confirming this always, in the words of St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, "by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, in a holy spirit, in unfeigned love, in truthful speech, in the power of God" (2 Cor 6, 6-7).

May the Blessed Virgin Mary enlighten and accompany you. And may the Apostolic Blessing which I gladly impart to all of you be your strength – here present and for your entire religious Family.